## NEW BOOKS.

### A Meretricious Lady Abbess.

We do not discover from reading Mr. Stanley J. Weyman's story of "The Abbess of Vlaye" (Longmans, Green & Co.) that the romantic quality of that romancer has at all declined. We should think that Mr. Howells, insistent realist, was still justified in feeling profoundly sorry for him.

We remember seeing in the town of Quedlinburg, in the edge of the Hartz Mountains, the exonerating tomb of an erratic Abbess of much distinction, the beautiful Aurora von Königsmarck, who was the mother of several of the great army of children born to Augustus the Strong, King of Saxony. There is some mention of her in Thackeray's "Four Georges," but Voltaire is the historian who wrote of her with enthusiasm. Whether it is true, as Voltaire relates, that she once knelt in the road as Charles XII. of Sweden rode along and sought in such humble attitude to deflect that warrior from some of his strong purposes, with the result that she was snubbed for her pains, we do not know; we have seen the story contradicted, and are inclined to put faith in the contradiction; but we saw the fair Aurora's picture in Quedlinburg, as well as her tomb, and we will wager that she was not snubbed often.

It is probable that this Abbess of Vlaye, in Mr. Weyman's story, had more than a touch of the prodigious beauty of that other head of a convent chronicled by Thackeray and by the great and most complimentary French historian. If her charms had not been extraordinary she would hardly have been the occasion of the culminating tragedy recorded in this book. We may say without seeming to boast of any unusual acuteness that we early divined trouble on her account between the Duke and the Captain of Vlaye. Dreadful trouble it was. We may afford a brief glimpse of it. In the chapter entitled "Fors L'Amour" we read:

"And bounding forward without warning he dashed the screen down and aside—and recoiled. Face to face with him, cowering against the doorpost, and pale as ashes, was the very man she had mentioned a minute before—that very man of his whose hidden presence in the camp she had betrayed to the malcontents. Vlaye glared at him. 'You!' he cried. 'You!'

" 'My lord!'

" 'And listening!'

" 'But——'

" 'But! But die, fool!' the captain retorted savagely. 'Die!' And, swift as speech, the dagger he had stealthily drawn gleamed above his shoulder and sank in the poor wretch's throat.

"The man's hands groped in the air, his eyes opened wide; but he attempted no return stroke. Choked by the life stream that gushed from his mouth, he sank back inert like a bundle of clothes, while the Abbess's low shriek of terror mingled with his stifled cry.

"And, with a sterner sound, another sound, for as the man collapsed, and fell in on himself, a figure hitherto hidden in the doorway sprang over his falling body, a long blade flashed in the candle light, and the Captain of Vlaye staggered back, one hand pressed to his breast. He made a futile attempt to ward with his poinard, but it fell from his grasp. And the pitiless steel found his heart again. Silent, grim, with unquenchable hate in his eyes, he reeled against the table. And then from the table, dragging with him all—silver and glass and fruit—in one common crash, he rolled to the floor—dying.

"Ay, in five seconds, dead! And she saw it with her eyes! Saw it! * * * The man who had struck the blow, and whose eyes still sparkled with fury, turned them upon her. He took note of her stupor, frowned, and with a swift, cruel glance searched the room. The lights were in sconces on the walls, and had not suffered. The rest was wreck—a splendid wreck, mingled terror and luxury, with the woman's Medusa-like face gazing on it. The Duke—for he it was——"

We stop, for we must be careful of the extent of our revelation. The marrow of a romance must be respected. The Abbess of Vlaye was what we have intimated—beautiful and not scrupulous. Tragedy and havoc were a consequence of her. Owing to her, as we have seen, the table furniture fell in a noisy ruin. The costly wine mingled with the blood of the slain characters. The reader will be kept awake. A glittering and vigorous story.

### Fine Story of a Cockney Poet.

It may be that the reader will think in the beginning that May Sinclair's story of "The Divine Fire" (Henry Holt & Co.) is not getting on very fast. The truth is that Horace Jewdwine, who starts the tale, is not an encouraging person. The reader will feel better when he has got beyond him and beyond the club of junior journalists in London. There is a vast difference when Savage Keith Rickman, the hero of the story, gets to unfolding himself, at first in the company of Miss Poppy Grace, the music hall young person, and later in that of Lucia Harden, the very memorable heroine of the book.

At page 45 we find Rickman, befuddled with Poppy's champagne, expressing to Poppy the sentiments of a young poet. The scene is Poppy's little flat in Bloomsbury. The hour is late. Poppy is of the opinion that it is high time for him to go, but it is not always easy to shut off a befuddled poet who is talking. We read:

"He intimated that though he worshipped every hair of Poppy's little head, and every inch of Poppy's little body, what held him at the moment were the fascinations of her mind and the positively gorgeous beauty of her soul. Yes; there could be no doubt that the object of his devotion was Poppy's imperishable soul.

" 'Well,' said Poppy, 'that tykes the very tip-top macaroon!'

"Then she laughed; she laughed as if she would never have done. She laughed, first with her eyes, then with her throat, then with her whole body, shaking her head and rocking herself backward and forward. She laughed till her hair came down, and he took it and smoothed it into two sleek straight bands, and tied them in a loose knot under her chin.

"Then she stopped laughing. Her face between the two tight sheaths of hair seemed to close and shrink to a thin, sharp bud. It closed and opened again, it grew nearer and bigger, it bent forward and put out its mouth (for it had a mouth, this extraordinary flower) and kissed him.

" 'I say, it's nearly 1 o'clock,' said she. 'You've got to clear out of this. Come!'

"She rose; she stood before him holding out her hands to help him to get up and go. She laughed again. She laughed wide mouthed, her head flung back, her face foreshortened, her white throat swelled and quivering—the abandoned figure of Low Comedy incarnate. But that was not what he saw.

"To him it was as if the dark, impenetrable world had suddenly unfolded, had blossomed and flowered in the rose of her mouth; as if all the roses of all the world went to make up the petals of that rose. Her body was nothing but a shining, transparent vessel for the fire of life. It ran over; it leapt from her; the hands she stretched out to him were two shallow lamps that could hardly hold the tall, upward shooting, wind-tortured splendor of the flame."

It will be seen from this that May Sinclair is a good hand at narrative. Her pen is no dull and wingless thing. Our hero poet was taken in a different manner when he went down into Devonshire to catalogue the great Harden library. It should be said that he was a new and secondhand book dealer and a cockney as well as a poet and scholar. He was young Mr. Rickman of Rickman's, his father being the senior and the proprietor of that establishment. The young man was distressed by his occupation; he wanted to be a poet alone. He was cut to the soul, moreover, by the knowledge that he spoke with a cockney accent and dropped the letter h when he was excited. For a poet to drop that letter when he got into a frenzy seemed to him tragic. Perhaps the chief terror of his life was his fear that he would call the heroine Miss 'Arden. It made him dreadfully nervous to have a lady look at him when he was eating. While he was cataloging the Harden library the heroine's friend, the sprightly Kitty Palliser, dropped in to see what he was like. When she had seen she reported to Miss Harden. We read:

" 'He is conscientious. He doesn't waste time. He writes with one hand while he takes his tea with the other; which, of course, is very clever of him. He's marvellously ambidextrous, so long as he doesn't know you're looking at him. Unfortunately, my eye arrested him in the double act. Lucy, my eye must have some horrible malignant power, for it instantly gave him St. Vitus's dance. Have you ever noticed anything peculiar about my eye?'

" 'What a shame!'

" 'Yes. I'm afraid he'll have to do a little recopying.'

" 'Oh, Kitty, why couldn't you leave the poor thing in peace?'

" 'There wasn't any peace to leave him in. Really, you'd have thought that taking afternoon tea was an offence within the meaning of the Act. He couldn't have been more excited if I'd caught him in his bath.' "

Humor as well as flights of the poetical fancy. The reader will be amused between the takings of him by storm. Kitty says of the poet in another place, when Lucia is thinking of taking him to Italy as her private secretary: "You say he won't be in the way. He will. He'll be most horribly in the way. He'll go sliding and falling all over the place [Rickman had once come notably to grief on Lucia's polished drawing room floor] and dashing cups of coffee on the marble floors of the Palazzo; he'll wind his feet in the tails of your best gowns, not out of any malice, but in sheer nervous panic; he'll do unutterable things with soup—I can see him doing them."

"I can't," said Lucia.

"No," said Kitty. "I know you can't. I don't say you've no imagination; but I *do* say you're deficient in a certain kind of profane fancy."

The story of the cockney poet Rickman as it goes on is a remarkable piece of work. It makes a copious and varied and finely drawn history which the reader will follow charmed and often wondering.

### He's Rude to the Ladies.

The humor of Jerome K. Jerome's book of sketches called "American Wives and Others" (Frederick A. Stokes Company) is not so easy and not so effective as some of his funmaking that we have seen. The American wives of his consideration are those who take the children to Europe, leaving the husbands at home. "You take my advice," Mr. Jerome purports to have said to a young American wife in Dresden, "and go back home. I take it that in America proper there are millions of real homes where the woman does her duty and plays the game. But also it is quite clear that there are thousands of homes in America, mere echoing rooms, where the man walks by himself, his wife and children scattered over Europe. It isn't going to work; it isn't right that it should work. You take the advice of a sincere friend. Pack up—you and your children—and get home."

Just a little boisterous. George McManus, who illustrates the book, has a picture of the abandoned husband "working hard in Detroit." He is drinking at the bar, and the caricaturist in drawing him has invested him with an appearance of idiocy so wildly superhuman as to render Mr. Jerome's advice to his wife quite absurd as well as definitely rude.

The humorist refuses to believe that Goethe's last wept for heroine was unsophisticated. "What was she doing with that box of jewels, anyhow?" he asks. "She was not a fool. She could not have gone every day to that fountain, chatted with those girl friends of hers and learned nothing. She must have known that people don't go leaving twenty thousand pounds worth of jewels about on doorsteps as part of a round game. Her own instinct, if she had been a good girl, would have told her to leave the things alone. I don't believe in these innocent people who do not know what they are doing half their time. Ask any London Magistrate what he thinks of the lady who explains that she picked up the diamond brooch 'not meaning, of course, your Worship, to take it. I would not do such a thing. It just happened this way, your Worship. I was standing, as you might say, here, and not seeing any one about in the shop, I opened the case and took it out, thinking as perhaps it might belong to some one—and then this gentleman here, as I had not noticed before, comes up quite suddenly and says, "You come along with me," he says. "What for?" I says, "when I don't even know you," I says. "For stealing," he says. "Well, that's a hard word to use to a lady," I says; "I don't know what you mean, I'm sure." If the lady happens to be Goethe's Marguerite the Magistrate, I suppose, would apologize to her and tell her that she left the court without a stain upon her character."

There we have two gentle souls that the humorist rebukes—Gretchen and the wandering lady from Detroit. We have not thought what snubs, neglect, or other grievances he has sustained to make him so caustic. The sketches are twenty-five in number, and the illustrations are copious. Both text and pictures have the unattenuated and robust vigor that we have indicated.

### From a Vassar Novelist Far Away.

It is not likely that Miss Edith Rickert, an American from Vassar, went to Scotland for a story because she believed that that land of dialect had been neglected by its own story tellers. Perhaps she was charmed by the recent Scottish fiction—as many must have been, or there never would have been so much of it—and felt that she could have no better model. In "The Reaper" (Houghton, Mifflin & Co.) she has furnished a story of the Shetland Islands. It is sombre in tone, as doubtless befits that place, which is in the sixtieth degree of latitude and isolated. Of the dialect we are not qualified to speak critically; it seems to have been conscientiously studied and carefully and sympathetically employed. We have noticed the use of "geng" instead of "gang" and of "dona ken" instead of "dinna ken," and this departure from the form employed by Mr. Crockett has been pleasing to us. Of course the Shetland Islands are very near to Norway. We have remarked with very definite pleasure the proper name Osla Petersdaughter.

Here are the hero of the story, Terval, and the heroine, Meggy-Betty, after the storm in the chapter called "The Sowing of the Sea." Terval's mother is lying at home drunken with whiskey after a spell of second sight in which she declared: "The fear is on me, the fear is on me! They cover the sea like a harvest; and the spars of their boats rise and fall on the foam—on the foam. Oh, the faces of them all—riding on the backs of the waves—there'll be wailing among the women the morn." Terval's father is about coming back a cripple with the remnant of the shattered fishing fleet. We read:

"He waited then until a girl appeared—Meggy-Betty—her eyes red with weeping and her straight brown hair blown in unsightly strands about her ears. She had forgotton her hat as usual.

" 'They're come ashore, Terval,' she called from below. He drew a long breath, but said nothing.

" 'Where's your mother?' she asked when she had reached the gate where he stood.

"He remembered how his cheeks had scorched as he answered slowly, 'Asleep.'

"She made some slight exclamation, but continued at once: 'Poor body! It's awful work the day. They'll be bringing him home soon.'

" 'Is he dead?' asked Terval then, in an undertone.

" 'Na, na, no such thing.' She began, with a sort of quivering eagerness, stopped and concluded slowly: 'They say—he'll never walk again.'

"He looked at her in silence.

"Suddenly she laid her head on the top of the gate, whispering: 'There's more as twoscore o' the boats no been seen, and only six come home.'

"And still he could not speak; and she went on, almost as if dreading his silence: 'It seems wicked like—all our own safe—and scarce another house but has one or more gone—the six Peterson boys—and Ole Johnson, with Jimmy and Rob, and Mary's husband, ye ken, Henry Paulson—oh! it's just pitiful—Terval, can ye no say anything? I'm come to help your mother.' "

There is plenty more in the book that is as sad as this. Even the understanding between Terval and Meggy-Betty at the last is not cheerful. We cannot say that it is essential that it should be.

### A Great American Painter.

Unappreciated and neglected for a great part of his life, Homer Martin had the satisfaction in his last years of knowing that the American public was at last beginning to recognize his genius, and since his death that public has awakened to the knowledge that in him it had one of the great landscape painters of the century. His widow, in "Homer Martin: A Reminiscence" (William Macbeth, New York), has written a remarkable sketch of peculiar interest that could have been written by nobody but herself.

It is the intimate history of the man as he appeared to her, with hints of the struggles through which both went, but nothing of the Homer Martin known to his fellow artists and to the world. That side of his life she has left for others to tell. It is a pathetic story and at the same time an extraordinary piece of description. With strange impersonality Mrs. Martin shows the steps in her husband's mode of thinking and the advance in his artistic life and ideas.

The difficulties under which he labored when painting his last great paintings are almost incredible. An oculist who examined his eyes decided "that the optic nerve of one of them was dead, while the other was partially clouded by a cataract." Yet after this he painted his brilliant "The Adirondacks." His wife said to him as he was putting on the finishing touches: " 'Homer, if you never paint another stroke, you will go out in a blaze of glory!' 'I have learned to paint at last,' he answered. 'If I were quite blind now, and knew just where the colors were on my palette, I could express myself.' "

The little volume is illustrated with an excellent portrait of Homer Martin in a characteristic attitude and with a dozen well chosen reproductions of his pictures. It is more than a memento for his friends and admirers; it is a first class document for his life and for the history of American painting.

### The Human Passions Strongly Treated.

It was the way of all the Ellisons to dance. This declaration by Mrs. Ellison will be found at page 5 of Emerson Hough's story "The Law of the Land" (the Bobbs-Merrill Company, Indianapolis). There is a frontispiece picture of Miss Lady Ellison dancing. She is flinging herself gayly and laughing at the mirror as she tosses her clothes about in bewildering spirals in the manner of Miss Loie Fuller. The so-called Mrs. Ellison was not really her mother. She was an adventuress. There will be found at page 142 something that she said of herself in a fit of jealous temper provoked unconsciously by Miss Lady Ellison. She addresses that astonished and lovely young person. We read:

" 'So now, you treacherous little cat,' said Mrs. Ellison between her shut teeth, 'you've been at work, have you? Oh, I might have known it all along. You've been trying to undermine me, have you? Why, do you think I'll let a little minx, a half baked brat like you, keep me out of getting the man I want? I'll show you, Miss Lady girl!' * * *

" 'Oh, mamma, mamma,' cried Miss Lady, 'do not!'

" 'Oh, mamma, mamma!' mocked the other. 'Stop your tongue, girl, and don't you dare to call me mamma again. I am not your mother, and never was!' "

This will show something of the quality of this stirring tale. Mrs. Ellison thought that Miss Lady loved Col. Blount, the middle aged planter. Nothing of the sort. She loved young Eddring, agent of claims, as cool a man in a real emergency as the late Mr. Montague used to be in a stage play. "If you take your hands from out your trousers pockets," said Mr. Montague, "my word as an officer and a gentleman, that moment I will cut you down." "Do you follow me?" said Eddring to Decherd, as the two sat conversing in the steamboat cabin. "Oh, give up thinking of your gun. I'll kill you if you move a hand." We were never more convinced of anything than we were that Montague and Eddring would have done precisely as they threatened, in case the other people had not taken heed.

We feel it proper to say that Henry Decherd was a thorough-paced rascal. There is abundant revelation of him in small compass at page 402. He had been looking at a lot of photographs taken from his trunk in his hotel bedroom. They were pictures of his abandoned sweethearts. We read:

" 'My God!' cried Henry Decherd suddenly. 'They're alive! They're coming to life!'

"They stood about him now in the little room, smiling, beckoning—Alice, Nora, Kate, Jane, Margaret, all the rest—as he addressed them. * * * The face of Alice Ellison, strong jawed, dark browed, large eyed, stared at him steadily from

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